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Fifty Years of Freedom

or

From Cabin to Congress

A Drama in Five Acts.

by

KATHERINE DAVIS TILLMAN

Author of *Thirty Years of Freedom*, *Aunt Betsy's Thanksgiving*,
Lincoln's Proclamation, etc., etc.

*Published by the A. M. E. Book Concern,
631 Pine St., Philadelphia, Pa.*

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CHARACTERS.

BENJAMIN BANNEKER HOUSTON, An Ambitious Young Kentuckian
AUNT RHODA A Southern Mammy
LINDY Aunt Rhoda's Ward
JAKE A Trifling Husband
SUE }
LOUPHENIA } Aunt Rhoda's Daughters
PANSY }
LIGE }
GLADSTONE } Aunt Rhoda's Sons
COLONEL WHITE A Gentleman of the South
MISS LOU His Beautiful Daughter
ROBERT WHITE Her Suitor
RUTH PENN A Quaker Teacher
PRESIDENT NORTON President Bayview University
ARTHUR NORTON His Son
PROF. COX }
PROF. WEIR } Members of the Faculty
PROF. MINOR }
PROF. WARD }
VAN WERT }
OGDEN } Students
STEWART }
POWELL }
GEORGE NEIL A Successful Negro Lawyer
EDITH NEIL His Young Daughter
MRS. NEIL His Wife
IDA CAMPBELL }
JULIA STORM } Friends of Edith
MAID
Guests at the reception.

TMP96-006728

Act 1.

SCENE I. (*Interior of Aunt Rhoda's cabin, calico curtains at window, Bible on center table, family portraits on wall, portraits of Douglass, Lincoln, Bruce, Aunt Rhoda, a pleasant-faced woman of perhaps 45, is stirring cake in an old-fashioned yellow crock. Lindy, a pretty girl of 12, is holding Gladstone, and at the same time, attempting to read. Pansy, a girl of 8, is singing a plantation ditty. Louphenia, 10, is clapping her hands in time to the tune, and Lige barely 7, is watching the cake bowl with hungry longings.*)

PANSY (*sings*).—"Juber dis and juber dat,
Juber killed a yaller cat;
Ain' yo' 'shame, yo' dirty dog,
Dance this juber."

AUNT RHODA.—Why don' yo' children stop makin' so much noise? It's enough to wake up the dead, the way you uns go on. Why don' yo' clar out from under my feet anyhow. You allus as thick as flies when you're not wanted. I don' look for you uns to get a blessed thing Chrismus 'cause you so hard-harded.

LIGE (*whiningly*).—I want the bowl when you through with it Mammy, Pansy had it the las' time.

PANSY (*indignantly*).—I didn't 'tall, Mammy, Lige had it his own self, didn't he Louphenia?

LOUPHENIA (*witheringly*).—Cose he did.

AUNT LOU.—Here Lindy, put dat book down and get dese children out do's befo dey drive me plum crazy. Here's Miss Lou spectin' company fo' Chrismus, and dat trifling Sue ain' got mo'n haf the cakes baked. I clar to gracious, Sue can't get aroun' haf as good as her ole mammy wid all de rheumatism I

got in my jint. (*Lindy tries to get the children out, when a rap is heard. Lindy opens the door and a bare-footed boy of fourteen staggers in. He has a bundle tied in red 'kerchief on his shoulders and around his hat is a band of black calico.*)

AUNT R.—Great head of the church, who is this? (*sets cake bowl on table.*)

BEN.—Is this my Aunt Rhoda? (*he sinks down in a chair as if exhausted.*)

AUNT R. (*rushes to him and lifts his head. He is a well-developed lad, with a handsome face and speaks better English than the average colored Southern boy.*)—It's Ben, my Sister Lucy Ann's baby boy, her only living child. I see the favor. Lindy han' me de cordial quick. Po' chile 's he's jus' played out. (*Pours cordial down Ben's throat. He revives.*) There now, he's comin' 'roun' alright. (*Hugs Ben.*) Yes this is yo' Aunt Rhoda. You favor Lucy Ann, up an' down. They say that a boy that favors his mammy is bo'n fo' good luck. How is Sister Lucy Ann anyhow, an' why didn't you sen' word you's comin'? I clar to goodness, you mos' took my bref, comin' in on me so sudden.

BEN.—Mother's dead, Aunt Rhoda, and I haven't got anybody in the world but you. (*Wipes eyes on coat sleeve.*)

AUNT R.—Lucy Ann dead? (*Begins to cry. The children join her, except Lindy, who tries to quiet them.*) Po' lam', tain't no mo' an' could be expected. She never was strong an' she's been ailing a long time. When did she die?

BEN (*wipes eyes again on coat sleeve*).—She's been dead three weeks to-day. She suffered like everything. She called me to the bed before she died and told me if they didn't treat me right, after she was dead, I could come to you.

AUNT R.—Course you can stay with your Aunt Rhoda. I'm po' as Job's turkey, an' he was so po' he had to lean agin the fence to balance hisse'f, but long as me an' the chillens got a

piece of bread I'll divide it with you, an' what I lack the Lord who's promised to look after the orphans, will make up.

BEN. (*puts hand in bosom and draws out a package*).—Aunt Rhody, mother sent you her ear-rings and breastpin an' a quilt she pieced while she's sick. There were some more of her things I could have brought but Aunt Millie, the housekeeper and the rest of them took them and I couldn't get hold of them.

AUNT R. (*examining things*).—I aint much han' fo' jewelry, but I'm goin' to wear these ear-bobs out of respect for Sister Lucy Ann. Po' Lucy Ann, I wish I'd a been there, when they was going through her things, an' he'ping themse'ves.

BEN.—Oh my poor head how it aches, I walked so far and I feel so faint.

AUNT R. (*suspiciously*).—Walked? Did you tramp all the way here from Lucy Ann's? You run away that's what you's done. What you run away for? It's a blessin' twasn't cold or you'd froze to death sure.

BEN.—'Cause mother told me to come to you if I wasn't treated right. Col. Thomas beat me like a dog for nothing and I ran off.

AUNT R.—What did he beat you fo', I hope you didn't do nothin' mean and ornery?

BEN.—Why Aunt Rhody, I been working for Col. Thomas up at the big house long before mother got sick, waiting on him and tending to his horse, and he seemed to think a heap of me and always gave me his old papers and magazines when he was through with them, and Aunt Millie used to let me read some of the books out of the book-case when she was in a good humor.

AUNT R.—Well, hurry up chile, for the lan's sake an' tell the res'. Don' go all aroun' Robin's Hood's barn befo' you tell what happened, yo' remin' me of yo' Uncle Jake's prayin'. He goes way to Jerusalem an' back befo' he gets through.

BEN.—Well, 'twasn't nothin' for him to get mad at anyhow. You know mother was always crazy about schooling herself and she's always urged me to study hard as I could at school, and I did and I always stood head of my classes. Well, 'twas a day or two after mother died and I picked up one of Col. Thomas's old newspapers and I read where some young colored man went from the South and worked his way through one of the biggest white colleges in the North and now he's a rich lawyer practicing in Michigan and the paper said how everybody black and white was proud of him, because he worked his way up from the bottom, and all at once something seemed to say to me, "Why don't you do that, Ben? You're not afraid of hard work," and it seemed like I could hear mother saying to me like she used to, "Ben learn all you can and never be too lazy to work and you'll get through the world, even if your poor mother does have to die and leave you alone."

AUNT R. (*wiping her eyes*).—Ben Houston ain't you never coming to the point?

BEN.—Yes'm, I'm most through. I was telling Aunt Millie and some of the rest of them about what I'd read and what I'd like to do, and they told Col. Thomas that I was thinking about running off and he called me up to the house and asked me about it, and when I told him I'd like to go, because I thought I'd have a better chance to get an education he got mad and said that all education was good for was to spoil Negroes for work, and we wasn't worth our salt anyhow, since Freedom. He asked me what good education would do me, and I said it would make a man of me, and then he said I was giving him impudence and he took the buggy whip and whipped me like everything, and he never had touched me when mother was living, and I knew he didn't have any right to whip me when I hadn't done anything, so I watched my chance and ran away.

AUNT R.—That wasn't nothin' to beat yo' for if that was all,

but you know there's plenty of white folks everywhere thinks just like him, that education spoils colored fo'ks fo' work an' I guess it do spoil some of 'em same's it does white folks. You was right to come, you don't have to stay no where you don't want to unless you're bound out by the law. We're free now, thank God! I don't know how you're going to get any schoolin' because the colored fo'ks haven't got any school round here 'cep'n de Sunday school Miss Lou carries on here in my cabin every Sunday, but Lindy ain't been to no other school and she reads to beat the band.

BEN.—That would hardly do for me, Aunt Rhody, because I finished the school at home last year, and could have got a school to teach if mother had been well enough to leave.

AUNT RHODA.—Sake's alive, you sho' is sma't. Done finished school an' talkin' about goin' to college.

LINDY.—Aunt Rhoda, don't you think cousin Ben ought to have something to eat.

AUNT R.—That's the born truth! Get that piece of hog jole out of the cupboard and the sweet taters out of the ashes and see if the hoe-cake ain't brown (*Lindy goes out*). Heah, Pansy, Lou, Pheny, Lige and Gladstone shake hands with your cousin Ben, (*the children advance bashfully. Ben takes Gladstone on his knee*). Now you's seen all the family 'cep'n yo' Uncle Jake, and my oldest girl Sue who works at the big house for Miss Lou and Colonel White. Set up Ben and eat. (*Ben goes to the table and eats*). Heah, children, take dis bread and clear out, (*gives bread to children, exit all but Lindy, who sets more plates on the table and remains interested in the conversation*).

BEN.—Isn't Lindy my cousin too?

AUNT R.—No, Lindy is Jake's niece, Celia's girl. Her mother's dead and she ain't got nobody to look after her but me, but you can call her cousin jes' the same as you do the res' de chillen.

LINDY. (*throwing her arms around Aunt R's neck*).—And Aunt Rhoda is so good to me.

BEN.—Aunt Rhody, you've got a big heart! (*Voice is heard outside singing. Enters Jack*).

JAKE.—Hello, there ole woman, didn' you forgit to blow a dinner horn?

AUNT R.—Couldn't you tell whether the horn was blowed or not?

JAKE.—De way my insides feel it orter blowed whether it did or not.

AUNT R.—You'll never die in debt to your stomach Jake Jones, you don't study 'bout a livin' thing but eatin' an' possum huntin'.

JAKE.—Possum mighty good ole lady and when you bring him out of de oven, he's cooked good enuf fo' de president of the United States to eat. (*sees Ben*). Why who's this?

AUNT R. (*mollified*).—It's Lucy Ann's boy Ben. Po' Lucy Ann's dead and he's come to stay with us. Jus' think my po' sister's gone and I didn't know a thing about it. (*wipes eyes*).

JAKE.—Dat's what dat dog's been doin' a howlin' 'round dis place fo' de las' month, well she suffered a long time, sho' Ben, chile, you're welcome to our po' cabin. We'll try to fin' you a bite to eat and a bunk at night as long as you's willing to stay.

BEN.—Thank you, Uncle Jake, all I want is a chance to go to school and learn something. I'll try not to to give you and Aunt Rhody any trouble, I can do lots of work.

JAKE. (*aside*).—He is de boy, I'm lookin' fo' for Colonel White certny do impose on my constitution, making me work so hard. Dat's a good sperit, Ben, and if you feel rested enuf you might come out to de fiel' dis afternoon.

AUNT R.—'Deed he ain't going to no fiel' to-day. Don't you

see the chile's all played out tramping all the way from Henry County way heah?

JAKE.—Alright Rhoda, I didn't mean no harm. (*walks to table, sits and helps himself*). By de way. Rhody, I hearn a pow'ful piece of news to-day.

AUNT R.—You don't say, I hope none of the colored folks got in any trouble.

JAKE.—Oh, no, it's good news, or you'll say so anyhow. A Quaker lady is here frum de North and going to start a school heah for de cullud fo'ks.

LINDY. (*jumps up*).—Oh I am so glad.

BEN.—Just what I was wishing.

AUNT R.—Who's a telling you, Jake?

JAKE.—Why St. Nichols. Aunt Mandy's daughter's boy Ike.

AUNT R.—Well his mouth ain't no prayer-book, but it may be so. Where they think they going to have it?

JAKE.—Dey don't know but dey wants to have it at de Cross Road's Church. ..

AUNT R. (*meditatively*).—I wonder if they's asked the white fo'ks if they kin start the school. Kinder late in de season too, right heah at Christmas.

JAKE. (*gesticulating*).—What dey gwine ask de white fo'ks fo'? Ain't we cullud fo'ks free? Is de 'Mancipation Proclamation passed in Congress or not? Ain't we free same as de white fo'ks? Catch me askin' a white man whether I can do anything or not?

(*Col. White from outside thunders*) Jake. (*Jake jumps up from the table with astonishing alacrity.*)

JAKE.—Suh?

COL. WHITE. (*calls*).—You get that field finished up this afternoon, you hear, you lazy, black rascal?

JAKE.—Yes, suh, yes, suh, I'm comin' Colonel (*starts out in a hurry*).

AUNT R.—Land sakes alive! I ain't got that cake baked. (*Hurries around and begins to stir the cake.*) Clar out from here, de las' one of you, or I'll skin you alive! (*children scamper right and left*).

(*A rap is heard.*)

(*Aunt R. runs out with cake-bowl, comes back wiping her hands.*) I wonder who on earth's comin' here now. (*opens door, Ruth Penn the Quaker teacher stands on the threshold. She is attired in the gray Quaker garb and is a sweet-faced woman of 30.*)

RUTH.—This is Friend Rhoda, I know.

AUNT R.—Yes, ma'am, I'se a friend to everybody, sho's you bo'n, and you're de Quaker lady the Lord has sent to lead us po' cullud fo'ks from darkness into light. Come in.

(*Ruth comes in. Sits down. Dusts rocker with her apron.*) The good Lord knows, I hope and trust that the school will be started. There's just a few colored fo'ks aroun' here an' all of 'em po' an' not able to pay a teacher, an' so we ain't had no school.

RUTH.—Yes, I am Ruth Penn, and I have come from my home in New England to labor here among your people. I know that our work is apt to meet with opposition and I thought perhaps thee could give me some advice. This is Friend White's land, thee is on is it not?

AUNT R.—Yes, ma'am, almost far as you kin see looking toward the South is Col. White's lan' and me an m'os' all my fo'ks used to belong to the Whites, and I was the chillen's nurse after mammy died and I never could make up my min' to leave the old place. Course I might leave an' do better an' then agin I mightn't.

RUTH.—So thee has been in the family all thy life and nursed the children? Are they all living?

AUNT R.—No, there's just two chillen left, the one they call Lady Mary and our Miss Lou.

RUTH.—Lady Mary? Are they English?

AUNT R.—Mistress was English born and bred, and after she died one of her English cousins came over here and married Miss Mary, and after his brother died, it made her a Lady Mary, and they call him Lord Clyde but I think that's downright heathenish to call any body Lord here on earth, and I've always been expecting to hear of something dreadful to happen to him for taking the Lord's name that way.

RUTH. (*smiling*).—Thee must be a little bit of a Quaker, Friend Rhoda. We do not use titles for ourselves or others. So the mistress died. Were there any sons?

AUNT R.—Yes, she died heart-broken over losing her two boys, master Louis and master John, the two handsomest boys in the whole country, chillen I'd nursed ever since they were born, got killed the same day fighting in the Rebel Army. Mistress was always good as an angel and she hoped and prayed all the time that the colored fo'ks would all be free without any war, and when the word came and they was killed she went to bed and never got up.

RUTH.—Time brings about many sad changes. I asked not from idle curiosity but because I would know the disposition of the people before I appeal to them in aid of the school.

AUNT R.—Yes, there's just three left, Lady Mary in England, Col. White who's head's fas' blossomin' fo' the grave, and Miss Lou, the baby chile, dat I'd give my last drop of blood for, she's so dear to me.

RUTH.—Do you think I can enlist their efforts in starting the school?

AUNT R.—Miss Lou's all right. She's just like mistress. She

loves the colored people an' she'd go right in and teach herself if Col. White would let her. She could do it too, 'cause she went off to New Orleans to school when she wasn't out of short dresses jes 'bout 13 or 14 years old, and she's got a big education! She can do two or three kinds of talkin' 'sides what she talks to us, and she's always talkin' about helpin' de colored fo'ks but Col. White, it's accordin' how you catch him. Sometimes he's good as pie and 'nother time he rears and pitches like a lion he do.

RUTH.—You still work for them.

AUNT R.—Yes'm. I does the washing and mending for the rent of the cabin and a garden patch, and Jake my ole man and my daughter Sue, they's hired by the month. They don't get much though, 'cause all Col. White's got is some land and the rent he gets frum it don't hardly keep 'em going. Miss Lou she done got a little money of her own left from mistress' private fortune, but la me nothin' ain't like it used to be befo' the war. Why Christmas the big house would be full of company and down in the colored fo'ks quarters there'd be as much fun as up at the big house.

RUTH.—Well, friend Rhoda, I think thee had better go and speak to Friend White first and ask if we may have the school here on his land and I will follow on later and see what he says, will thee do this?

AUNT R.—It'll be mos' like Daniel going in the lion's den I 'spect, but I'll go, and you pray that the Lord of Hosts go with me.

RUTH.—If anybody can win him it will be thee, my good woman, his children's nurse and trusted friend. Never fear, the Lord of Hosts shall arm the Right!

(Exit Aunt R. and Ruth, enter Lindy and Ben.)

LINDY.—That's the Quaker lady who's going to start the school.

BEN.—Yes, I've seen pictures of them in books. They used to

carry slaves over the underground railroad when they were running away from the South.

LINDY. (*coming close to Ben*).—What, did they have a railroad under the ground?

BEN.—It wasn't a sure enough railroad, it was just kind white people like the Quaker teacher who took poor colored people in who were running away from slavery and helped them on their way.

LINDY.—I love kind people don't you Cousin Ben?

BEN.—Yes, that's why I love you. The rose is red, the violets blue, sugar's sweet and so are you.

LINDY.—Oh Cousin Ben, do you love me already? I love you too, and I'm sorry for you.

BEN.—Yes, I mean it Lindy. I'm only a poor colored boy, but I am going to work hard, study hard and make a man of myself so I can help my people.

LINDY.—Oh, Cousin Ben, like Frederick Douglass?

BEN.—Yes, and like Senator Bruce, Bishop Turner and other great Negroes. I had a colored teacher at home who used to talk to me about them all the time. I don't think I'll get much chance here, and if I get a chance I'm going to the North and find the college that colored lawyer graduated from.

LINDY.—Oh, what would I do, Cousin Ben. You promised to help me with my books.

BEN.—Stay here with Aunt Rhoda and learn all you can little Cabin Princess. Girls don't have to know as much as boys and when I get through school I'll come back and take you away with me. Do you want to wear my mother's ring so you won't forget.

LINDY.—Yes, Cousin Ben. (*Ben puts ring on Lindy's finger.*)

AUNT R. (*calls*).—Lindy.

LINDY. (*runs out*).—Yes'm.

Curtain.

ACT II.

SCENE II.—(*Colonel White's dining room, with a view of the kitchen when the door opens in the back-ground. Sue, a neat looking girl of eighteen in white sewing apron and cap is setting the breakfast table. Colonel White is at his desk reading the morning paper. Enters Aunt Rhoda in freshly laundered dress and apron, with tray on which are two covered dishes.*)

AUNT R. (*curtesying*).—Good mornin', good mornin', Colonel. How you feelin' this fine mornin'? You's lookin' mighty fine sure.

COL. W.—Pretty well, pretty well, Rhoda, for an old fellow. How's your rheumatism. Sit down there. Sue does well, but we miss you in the kitchen, nobody can beat your cooking, Rhoda.

AUNT R.—Thank you suh. Cooking allus did come handy to me some how. (*sits down.*)

COL. W.—Well, when it comes to cooking and singing, your folks are hard to beat.

AUNT R.—My rhematism ain't bothered me much fo' the las' day or two, an' I's feelin' so spry this mornin' that I got up a little earlier, and fixed up something a little extra fo' yo' breakfast. Heah, Sue put these dishes in the warming oven, I didn't know you'd be so late with yo' breakfast. Keep them hot till the Colonel is ready for his breakfast. (*Exit Sue with dishes.*)

COL. W.—What did you fix for me Rhoda?

AUNT R.—Oh, 'twant much. I jes' fried you a young chicken with the cream gravy you liked and baked you a pan of light rolls.

COL. W.—Why Rhoda that was very kind of you I am sure

Is there anything I can do for you? Children all well?

AUNT R. (*curtseys again*).—Yes, suh, all well an' able to eat all they kin git.

COL. W.—I repeat Rhoda, is there anything you wish. Is Jake in any new trouble?

AUNT R. (*tossing her head angrily*).—Nothing but what I can settle. He went to town and came back full as a tick, but I waited till he went to bed and then I used the cloes stick on him until he was sober as anybody.

COL. W. (*laughs heartily*).—Rhoda, you are a great disciplinarian.

AUNT R. (*stiffly*).—What's that you callin' me? I hope you ain't callin' me names 'bout that triflin' Jake Jones.

COL. W. (*laughing more heartily than ever*).—No indeed, I'm complimenting you, Rhody, I mean that you manage Jake and the children well, but are you sure there isn't something I can do for you this morning? Lou was telling me you wanted a new red table-cloth and knives and forks for Christmas. Is that what's worrying?

AUNT R.—No, suh, the Lord knows I ain't got that red table-cloth to study 'bout, I needs it, but I won't die if I don't get it. But now I come to think of it, there is something I might as well as ask you about while I'm up here.

COL. W.—I knew you wanted something Rhody, you was always a first class diplomat. Alright, what is it.

AUNT R.—Who owns the lan' the Cross Road's Church's on, Colonel White, you or Mr. Robert White?

COL. W.—Why I own it of course. I thought you knew that years ago. It's just this side of the boundary line, you may thank your stars for it, for Mr. Robert never would have let you had a church on his land. He's not a churchman and don't believe in churches.

AUNT R.—I always thanked my stars that my folks belong to your family instead of Mr. Robert's. Well, then if you own the lan' I know it will be alright.

COL. W. (*looking up from his paper*).—What will be alright, Rhoda?

AUNT R.—Why a school for the colored people that a Quaker lady's come from the North to start for the colored people.

COL. W.—Quaker lady nothing! Do you suppose ladies of any kind are going to leave their homes and come and live among Negroes to teach them? No, they have better sense. No, I'm not going to have any school started here. The Negroes don't need any school, they're not worth the powder and lead it would take to blow them up with, now. We don't need any educated niggers around here. (*stalks about room in a passion*.) We need Negroes to work the land, that's what we need!

AUNT R. (*starts to speak and wipes eyes on apron. Sue comes to door peeps in and listens anxiously. Enters Miss Lou. She a girl of fragile build with brown hair and eyes. She wears a riding habit and has roses in her hands. She is pretty and refined.*)

MISS LOU.—Good morning, papa. (*kisses him*.) Isn't it a glorious morning. The birds are singing in the hedges and all the world seems happy. I had a splendid ride. Birdie still goes a little stiff but she can't help it, poor thing. Too bad she got that fall while I was in New Orleans. Am I late? Well, here is my peace offering. Aren't they beautiful? (*Holds out flowers.*) Out of the conservatory. Oh, how I love flowers. (*goes back of center and calls Sue.*) Sue, bring me some roses so that I can arrange these flowers.

SUE. (*pokes her head in from kitchen*).—Yes, Miss Lou.

MISS LOU. (*suddenly perceives Aunt R.*) Oh, here's mammy. (*Hugs her.*) Why, what's the matter with you, mammy?

COL. W.—She's pouting because I told her I wasn't going to have some meddling Quaker woman here from the North starting a school for the lazy niggers around here, on my land. Sue bring in the breakfast. (*Sue brings in breakfast.*)

MISS LOU. (*placing flowers in vases*).—Oh, papa, it must be right if mammy wants it, I never knew mammy to make a mistake. I've often wished I had time to start a day school for them. The years I spent at the school in New Orleans convinced me that education is good for everybody.

AUNT R.—I don't want my children to grow up in ig'nance if they ain't white I expected the Draines and the Peterses and all of the res' of the po' trash 'roun heah to be against having the school, but I didn't expect it of Colonel White. faithful as his colored fo'ks always been to him.

SUE.—Breakfast is ready, if you please, sir. (*Col. W. and Miss Lou seat themselves they bow their heads for a silent grace and begin to eat. As Col. White looks at the dishes, Rhoda has prepared for him, his sternness relaxes.*)

COL. W.—Oh, I don't care, have the school if you want to, but don't think any of you are going to slack work to go, and me paying you wages.

AUNT R.—Thank the Lord!

MISS LOU.—Papa, you're a darling.

AUNT R.—Good mornin', I must be getting back to the cabin.

COL. W. (*tossing her a half dollar*).—Here treat yourself, Rhoda, you gained your point as I expected you would.

AUNT R. (*smiling and slipping the coin in her pocket*).—Thank you, Colonel, you made me feel mighty dubious sir, mighty dubious, I tell you.

MISS LOU.—How are you getting along with the Christmas baking mammy? I couldn't help you and Sue any yesterday. I

was so busy with my Christmas gifts. It's a burden to have so many relatives and friends at holiday times.

AUNT R.—Everything baked but the pound cake. When the fo'ks comin'?

MISS LOU.—Oh, I guess they'll be here in time for dinner to-morrow. Cousin Robert sent word that he would be here in time for breakfast, but the others will come later. Here take this candy to Gladstone. (*reaches plate from table. Aunt R. takes it and departs. A rap is heard. Sue goes to door at left of stage.*)

SUE.—Colonel White, there's a lady to see you.

COL. W.—Who is it?

SUE.—I don't know, sir. She's a strange looking lady.

COL. W.—Tell her to come in. (*Enters Ruth Penn. Col. W. and Miss Lou rise. Col. W. bows gallantly.*)

COL. W.—I am Colonel White, and you are—

RUTH.—Ruth Penn, if thee please. I am sorry to disturb thee at thy breakfast hour.

MISS LOU (*extending hand*).—Oh, never mind that! I am the Colonel's daughter Louise. Won't you sit up and have breakfast with us?

RUTH.—Oh no, I will sit here while you finish. I am glad to know thee both.

COL. W.—You wished to see me?

RUTH.—Yes, if thee please; I came to thank thee for thy kind permission to start a school for the colored people here on thy land. Friend Rhoda has just told me the good news!

COL. W. (*angrily*).—I never could get around letting Rhoda have her own way, but I'm not in favor of the school. The Negroes need hoes and rakes more than they do spelling books.

RUTH.—Friend White, have not these people souls?

COL. W.—I don't know whether they have or not, madam; there are those who say not.

RUTH.—But thee does not believe such a wicked thing, I am sure. Thou knowest that they are human beings like ourselves, and that, having been turned adrift without education, money or friends, they need kind Christian people to live with them and teach them.

MISS LOU.—Oh, yes, that is true. So my dear mother used to speak. We shall be friends, I know.

COL. W.—And, Miss Penn, those who associate with the Negroes here in the South, for any purpose whatever, should realize, before doing so, that such a course of action ostracises them from the society of Southern people.

RUTH.—We Quakers follow Christ, and our work often leads us among the lowly. Your sweet daughter believes this, for I learn that she has started a Sunday-school among the poor colored people. Again I thank thee for the opportunity to open the school.

COL. W.—I gave my word to Rhoda to satisfy her; but, madam, I have no sympathy for those who come from the North to teach us our duty to our Negroes. I am a plain man, and I speak as I feel.

RUTH (*gently*).—Thou art blinded by the gods of this world. Thee will see differently some day. (*She glides out.*)

COL. W. (*pushing back his plate*).—Another Northerner down here on a fool's errand, wanting Negroes sent to school and put on an equality with the whites. Before the war it was against our law to teach them to read and write even, and thus we kept them in their places.

MISS LOU.—But, papa, listen. The colored people were brought

to this country against their will and made to toil like beasts of the field, to educate us, clothe us and keep us in luxury, while they were kept in ignorance and poverty; and I think that the South owes the colored people a chance, and a fair one at that!

COL. W.—Lou, you're getting beside yourself. Much learning doth make thee mad. Are these the principles you imbibed while off at school? Whose Negroes were better treated than mine? I believe in treating the Negro well as long as he behaves himself, just as I do my horse, my dog or any other animal.

MISS LOU.—Oh, papa, you are wrong to speak so! Does not the Bible say, "Out of one blood God created all the nations of the earth"? Is not the Negro our brother?

COL. W.—Here, Lou, this is enough of your impertinence! Don't presume on my love and try me too far! The idea of your thinking that a Negro could ever be equal to a white man! Out of one blood indeed! And is the proud Anglo-Saxon blood indeed the same as that of the inferior African? Haven't the Negroes owned the continent of Africa for centuries, and do they not still live there in an uncivilized state?

MISS LOU.—History tells us of a time when the Angles and Saxons were equally rude and barbarous. It was Christianity that tamed the wild Saxons and Angles. Let us give the Negro all of the advantages of Christian civilization before we say that he is incapable of reaching the same heights.

COL. W.—That I should have lived to hear a daughter of mine express such views! I'll not stay here to be insulted so. (*Starts off.*)

MISS LOU.—Oh, papa, do not be angry with me! I beg your pardon if I have offended you.

COL. W.—Say no more, miss; say no more! (*Goes out and slams the door.*)

MISS LOU (*sadly*).—What have I gained but my father's deep displeasure? He is unreasonable on this question. Sue, you may clear away the table now.

(*Enters Sue, who removes dishes quickly and puts cover on the table.*)

MISS LOU.—Bring my sewing basket, Sue. To-morrow is Christmas, you know, and I have some gifts to finish. (*Sue brings basket. Miss Lou takes out sewing and begins to sew.*) Have you finished that book I lent you, Sue?

SUE.—Yes'm. It was a fine book, Miss Lou.

MISS LOU.—Yes, it is a prime love story, St. Elmo. I read it twice in New Orleans. I don't think I could love a man like St. Elmo; could you, Sue?

SUE.—Law me! I don't know; I ain't never been in company.

MISS LOU (*sighing*).—Too bad there aren't some nice young fellows around. I'll have to hunt you a beau.

SUE.—I don't need none. I want to go to school and learn to be a teacher.

MISS LOU.—A teacher? Why, Sue, you'll have to study hard. I'll help you nights before we go to sleep. I'll do my own hair while you study.

SUE.—No'm, I love to do your hair. You've got a beau. I reckon he'll be over bright and early to-morrow.

MISS LOU.—My Cousin Robert? Yes, I s'pose he will. Papa and Uncle Robert are dead set on our marrying, but every time I see Robert I get more out of the notion.

SUE.—Mr. Robert's nice-looking, but they say he's got a bad temper.

MISS LOU.—Yes, the White temper. I know all about it. But it isn't that that keeps me from liking him. I like somebody else.

SUE.—Why, Miss Lou! Who?

MISS LOU.—I don't know so much about him, only that his father is the president of a big college in Michigan, and the young man was the youngest professor in the faculty. He was a nephew of our president at the New Orleans school.

SUE.—What's his name, Miss Lou?

MISS LOU.—Don't you ever tell, Sue. His name is Arthur Norton.

SUE.—Where do he live?

MISS LOU.—At Bayview, Michigan. I only saw him a few times, but he seemed to like me. But oh, well, I don't suppose we'll ever meet again! (*Sighs.*)

SUE.—Was he good-looking, Miss Lou?

MISS LOU.—Handsome! He had such kind gray eyes and such polished manners. But my! papa would never allow him to come here. All his folks were abolitionists.

SUE.—You don't say.

(*Footsteps are heard.*)

MISS LOU.—Sue, you can have that sprigged lawn of mine. I think it will just fit you. (*Lays finger on lips.*) Remember!

SUE.—Yes'm.

(*Enter Col. W. and Robert W. Exit Sue.*)

COL. W. (*in good humor, apparently; rubbing his hands together*).—I met Robert coming over, and I returned back with him. Make yourself at home, Robert. I'm going to hunt Sue and order up your breakfast. (*Exit Col. W.*)

ROBERT (*crosses over to Lou; takes her hands*).—And how is my fair cousin this Christmas Eve morning? The roses in your conservatory are not more fair to my eyes—

MISS LOU.—Fie, Cousin Robert! You were ever an arch flatterer.

ROBERT.—A man may not flatter when his whole being throbs with love, as mine does for you.

MISS LOU (*withdraws hands*).—Have I not told you it is in vain for you to speak thus? It can never be as you wish.

ROBERT.—Oh, say not never, dear cousin. Let me wait awhile. Answer me not now. You have changed since you went to New Orleans. I thought once you liked me.

MISS LOU.—Oh, Cousin Robert, I do; you are all the brother I have; but that is all. Rachel Draine is single yet. Why not court her?

ROBERT.—Lou, do not trifle with me. I have your father's consent, and I will marry you in spite of yourself.

(*Enters Col. White; sits at desk; takes up letters and begins to read.*)

COL. W. (*looks up from letter in his hand*).—Ah, here is a letter from Colonel Thomas, asking about a Negro boy who ran away from his place a short time ago, and his whereabouts have been made known by some of the servants. He says the fellow is very rude and impudent, by reason of too much schooling, but he wishes him returned and he will be responsible for the cost. (*The door leading into the kitchen is ajar, and Sue listens.*) He says further that the boy was given to him by his mother, who is dead, and he can claim him by law.

MISS LOU.—It is Ben, mammy's nephew.

ROBERT.—And do you keep here such a character?

COL. W.—I see little of the boy. He has been working around here with Jake, but I liked his appearance and had thought to hire him to help Sue about the house and accompany Lou on her drives.

MISS LOU.—That would be well. Ben is not rude and impudent. He is mammy's own sister's child, and came to her at her sister's dying request.

ROBERT.—But surely you will oblige Colonel Thomas, our richest and most influential neighbor, and return the boy? His son John visits me, comes New Year's. Send the boy back by him.

COL. W.—It may be the best thing to do. Colonel Thomas and I have business interests, and it is useless to quarrel about such a thing as sending the boy home. (*She disappears.*)

LOU.—I think he could not have been well treated. He was bruised from being beaten, ragged from head to foot, and half dead from his weary journey.

ROBERT.—Well, what would you, fair cousin—that he should come robed in a velvet gown, riding on a white charger? Do not rags and lashings belong to those of his class?

MISS LOU.—Cousin Robert!

COL. W.—You will never win Lou by talking thus. She has strange notions about Negroes and the way they should be treated.

ROBERT.—She has been shut up in school too long. When she has been home longer she will again think as we do.

MISS LOU.—I never thought as you do.

ROBERT.—Well, do not let us quarrel in the season of Christmas cheer and good will. Are you as fond of riding as you used to be?

MISS LOU.—Yes, if anything, more so.

ROBERT.—I hope, then, my Christmas present to you has not been ill chosen. I've a pretty mare outside awaiting your inspection. Will you come out and see him?

COL. W.—Of course she will. Come. I'm going to take another peep at her myself.

(Exit all. Enter Ben and Sue.)

BEN.—So Mr. John is to take me back to Colonel Thomas' at New Year's. Well, he won't find me here to take. I'm going on to the North. I hate to leave Aunt Rhoda and you and Lindy and the rest of the children and Miss Lou, but mother used to say where there's a will there's a way, and if you trust in God and do right you'll come out all right. I've got to try that mare for Miss Lou, and maybe that will be my chance. *(Exit Ben hurriedly.)*

SUE.—I'll tell mammy first chance I get. It's mighty resky for Ben to go so far from home.

(Re-enter Col. W., Robert and Miss Lou.)

ROBERT.—Since you have refused my gift, I think I had better relieve you of my presence also.

MISS LOU.—I am sorry, Cousin, but I could not accept it. But you must stay. It's a pretty sight to see mammy and her family come in after their Christmas gifts in the early morning, each one yelling, "Chrismus gif, Colonel! Chrismus gif, Miss Lou!"

COL. W.—Yes, it is fun to see them, though it brings back sad old memories of other days.

ROBERT.—I hardly think I shall stay. What about the boy? Will you send him back by me? I have a notion to spend the day with John Thomas.

MISS LOU.—Oh, no!

COL. W.—Why not, if he is to go at all? You are hard to please to-day.

MISS LOU.—'Tis not right.

COL. W.—I'll call him in and question him. *(Exit Col. W.)*

ROBERT.—Promise you will try to love me, and all shall be as you will. I will leave the boy.

MISS LOU.—I am a White too, Cousin Robert, and I have a mind and will of my own, and I say, once and for all, No!

Curtain.



ACT III.

SCENE III. *Bayview College. President's office. Prof. Norton, Secretary of the Faculty, is at his desk. Ben raps on the door.*)

PROF. N.—Come! (*Enters Ben, in poor but clean clothing. He carries his few old shabby books.*) Well, my lad, what can I do for you to-day?

BEN.—If you please, sir, I came to enter the university.

PROF. N. (*astonished*).—You don't mean it!

BEN.—Yes, sir. I heard about this school down in Kentucky a short time ago, and I made up my mind to graduate from this school if I lived.

PROF. N. (*smiling*).—I feel complimented by your selecting my alma mater. How did you happen to settle on the school, my lad?

BEN.—It's almost like a fairy tale, sir. I just happened to pick up a piece of old newspaper that told about a young colored fellow that had worked his way here from the South and graduated from this college, and how proud everybody was of him, and how he became a successful lawyer.

PROF. N.—You mean George Neil. Yes, the university is justly proud of him. We hope to see him a judge some day. He is a credit to us.

BEN.—The paper said the white people was as proud of him as the colored ones, and that is what inspired me to want to come. I want to be something too.

PROF. N.—Good! But seriously, my boy, sit down here and let me talk to you. How old are you, and what is your name?

BEN.—Ben Houston, sir; and since Miss Lou told me about Benjamin Banneker, the Black astronomer, I thought I'd call my name Benjamin Banneker Houston, if you don't mind.

PROF. N. (*starting*).—Miss Lou—who—— No, I have no objection to that name, I am sure. And your age?

BEN.—Going on sixteen now, sir. Miss Lou and Aunt Rhoda both said I was so big for my age nobody'd hardly believe I was older. I was fourteen when I left Colonel White's place to come here.

PROF. N.—Colonel White! I have heard of the Whites of Kentucky. Ben, it takes a number of years and a good deal of money to go through a school like this, and there would be a lot of preparatory work before you could begin to work for a degree.

BEN.—All I want is just a chance, sir. I don't care how hard I have to work. Couldn't I work my way through, sir?

PROF. N.—I don't know. I must talk with father. If the faculty is willing to admit you, it means that you must have a great deal of help to enter even the lowest classes of such a university as ours, with a view to graduating. However, a boy with your grit should be encouraged. Have you had any Latin, algebra or physics?

BEN.—Yes, sir, I've had a pretty fair start in all three. They didn't have it in our school at home, but our teacher had been through the book and he helped me nights.

PROF. N.—Good for him, and you too! Here! (*Hands examination sheets.*) Take these blanks (*writes hurriedly*) and this note, and go to that house over there across from the campus; and my mother will give you some dinner; and after you have eaten, write out the answers to these questions and bring them back to me. (*Exit Ben.*) Such perseverance would do credit to the proudest Anglo-Saxon blood. Heard of this university

own there in Kentucky, and came here seeking an education. Poor, despised African race, there must be something great in you, or you would not in the face of such discouraging circumstances make such heroic attempts to rise! Kept in a state of object slavery for more than two centuries, the moment the pressure is removed, up they spring, inquiring the way to the light of civilization. Truly we owe this people a chance! Miss Lou! Can Ben's Miss Lou be the beautiful Southern girl I met at New Orleans three years ago? She was very young then, but had mind as beautiful as her face. Her friends took pains to tell me that she was engaged to her cousin, and I have tried to forget her; but alas! "Her bright smile haunts me still." It must be my Miss Lou, for she lived out from Louisville and her father's name was White. I'll see the boy again and question him. Poor lad! I know that father will be willing to admit him if he can pass the preliminary examination, but I know not how it will be with the rest of the faculty. Some of the students made it unpleasant for Neil. Such a fine fellow, too!

(Enters President Norton. He is a fine-looking old gentleman of sixty, with a saintly face. He carries a cane.)

PRES.—Well, Arthur, my son, any new applications?

PROF. N.—Yes, a poor colored lad, who heard of our university down in Kentucky, and worked his way here in the hope of graduating from this university.

PRES.—He had pluck, all right. I'm afraid we'll have a fight on hand, but I'll do what I can for him, for I'll never be the man to shut the door of opportunity in the black man's face. *(Reclines.)*

Howe'er it be, it seems to me

'Tis only noble to be good.

Kind hearts are more than coronets,

And simple faith than Norman blood.

Tennyson never said a truer thing, to my mind.

PROF. N.—I'm with you, father. My sympathies are always with the under dog.

PRES.—Where is the candidate?

PROF. N.—I sent him over home for some dinner.

(*Ben raps.*)

PRES.—Come!

PROF. N.—Here he is, father. You look like another boy since you've had your dinner. Let me have the examination sheets gave you.

BEN (*hands them*).—I hope they're all right, sir.

PROF. N. (*examines paper*).—Excellent! Look here, father. How's this?

PROF. (*adjusts glasses, looks over papers*).—He's been studying. His answers show considerable knowledge of these subjects. I'd be willing to admit him on the strength of these answers. (*To Ben.*) And so, my lad, you're very anxious to be admitted to this university, and you have no money, and came here in the hope of working your way through?

BEN.—Yes, sir.

PRES.—Arthur, I think I'll step over to Professor Cox's room. Several of the faculty are there. (*Exit Pres.*)

PROF. N.—Ben, tell me about your Miss Lou. What kind of a looking young lady is she?

BEN.—Oh, she looks exactly like an angel, only prettier. She has long brown curls and big brown eyes, and the sweetest smile coming and going over her face all the time, and when she's talking to you her voice makes you think of the little singing birds in the woods.

PROF. N.—Why, Ben, that's quite poetical. Did you say that she is Colonel White's daughter?

BEN.—Yes, sir, Colonel White's her father, and Mr. Robert White, her cousin, is the one she's to marry. Aunt Rhoda says she never saw the man that was good enough to marry Miss

Lou, but Mr. Robert White's folks and Colonel White always been dead set for him and Miss Lou to marry. (*Steps are heard.*)

PROF. N. (*sharply*).—The faculty! (*Throws open door to left.*) Sit in here, Ben, and look over the magazines until they are through.

(*Exit Ben. Enter Pres. and members of the faculty.*)

PROF. COX.—President Norton, I repeat, it is an outrage to admit another Negro to an institution like ours. We lost five students the last year Neil was here. I'm one of the oldest members of the faculty, and I think my opinion ought to have some weight.

PROF. WEIR.—It seems a shame to turn away any who seek higher education, but I am somewhat of Professor Cox's opinion.

PROF. MINOR.—It does not seem to me that the time has yet arrived for Negroes to graduate from our best institutions.

PROF. WARD.—Professor Norton will speak for the rest of us.

PROF. N.—Gentlemen of the faculty of Michigan's noblest institution, I am here to plead the cause of the humblest and most helpless client an advocate could have. My client is a Negro lad, born in adversity and nurtured in poverty. From a Kentucky cabin he has worked his way hence and knocks at our doors for admittance. Should we admit him and allow his intellectual thirst to be quenched at our fountains of knowledge? He has nothing to offer us of this world's goods, for his ancestors gave to ours over two and a half centuries of unrequited toil. What contrast to our white students, who, for the most part, come to us from homes of wealth and culture, the sons of parents who do all within their power to stimulate them toward the goal of the highest type of citizenship; but my young client, without educated parents, or favorable environment, starts out to seek the same grand heights! Will you close the door of hope in his face? Will you deny him his chance? Gentlemen, it was but yesterday

that the shackles were burst from his limbs. Shall we refuse to unshackle his mind?

(*Part of the Professors say, "No!"*)

PRES.—Is there any one else who wishes to speak? I will say that the young man passed a very creditable preliminary examination. I will now take a vote. All who are willing to admit the Negro boy rise.

PROF. COX (*to Prof. Weir*).—The Nortons run everything. I won't be obstinate.

(*All rise.*)

PROF. N. (*shakes hands with all*).—Thank you, gentlemen, thank you!

PRES.—Aye, you voted like men. It reminded me of the days of Garrison and Sumner in dear old New England.

PROF. N. (*opens door of outer room*).—Ben! (*Enters Ben.*)

PRES.—Gentlemen of the faculty, the student you have voted to admit. What is your name, sir?

BEN.—Benjamin Banneker Houston.

PRES. N.—Mr. Houston, gentlemen.

Curtain.



ACT IV.

SCENE IV. (*College campus. Group of students with textbooks under their arms, among them Harry Van Wert, Robert Ogden, Richard Stewart.*)

VAN WERT.—I say, it's a beastly shame to have that nigger here in the university with us. We don't stand for anything like that in Texas, I tell you.

OGDEN.—Well, we don't like it any better in Massachusetts than you do in Texas—that is, a whole lot of us.

STEWART.—Hush! here he comes now.
(*Enters Ben with books under his arm.*)

VAN WERT.—The dark clouds are gathering. I guess it's going to rain.

OGDEN.—Hello, coon!

STEWART.—Oh, say, now, fellows, don't be so rough.

VAN WERT.—I suppose you think you're white because you're here. I wouldn't stay where I wasn't wanted.

(*Ben stops, looks at him quietly, then starts to go on.*)

VAN WERT.—Don't look at me that way, Negro, or I'll let you know who I am.

BEN.—I know who you are now, Van Wert.

VAN WERT.—Pray let us have the benefit of your opinion.

BEN.—You are a cheap bully.

VAN WERT.—You dare insult me like this! (*Strikes him. The other two do likewise, and Ben is knocked down. Students come running. Some cry "Shame!" Ben gets up. Stewart and Ogden*

run. Ben pounds Van Wert. President Norton comes up. Other students disappear.)

PRES.—Gentlemen, what is the meaning of this disgraceful scene?

VAN WERT (*pointing to Ben*).—This coon insulted me.

PRES.—Calm yourself, Van Wert; such language is not permitted here. Ben, I am surprised to hear such a complaint of you.

OGDEN.—That's what comes of having a Negro in the university.

STEWART.—I hope he'll be expelled at once.

PRES.—Rest assured, gentlemen, the matter shall be thoroughly investigated. Come to the office with me, Houston.

(Exit President and Ben.)

VAN WERT.—I guess we've got him in a pretty scrape at last. We must stick together and get him expelled if we can.

OGDEN.—Yes he's getting entirely too prominent around here. Professor Norton makes a regular fool of him.

STEWART.—It will never do for him to know that we started the trouble. Come on, let's go.

(Exit students. Enter Ben with Powell, a student friend.)

BEN.—It looks pretty dark for me. I am afraid that President Norton thinks I was in the wrong. I have tried so hard to be patient under the insults of the last six years, but my persecutions grow worse.

POWELL.—I don't believe Professor Norton will fail you. He thinks so much of you. And I'll stick by you for the sake of old Kentuck, if for nothing else.

BEN.—Yes, as poor as I am, I would have, perhaps, given up

the idea of graduating from this institution had it not been for the encouragement given me by Professor Norton and his father. Whenever the Professor meets me he has an encouraging word; and then he has been so kind in getting me work to pay my expenses. (*Enter Professor Norton.*)

PROF. N.—Good morning, Powell, I wish to see Houston a few moments.

(*Powell lifts hat and walks off. Professor Norton takes Ben's arm.*)

PROF. N.—Benjamin Banneker Houston, what's this I hear of you? You've actually been in a row, insulted his Lordship Van Wert, and made a brutal attack upon him besides.

BEN.—Professor Norton, do you believe Van Wert?

PROF. N.—Not often. Tell me about the whole thing, Ben.

BEN.—Van Wert's been after me ever since I've been here. He and his friends have lost no opportunity to taunt me about my race, color and poverty. I have borne it patiently. To-day on my way to the astronomy class, Van Wert made remarks about a dark cloud gathering as I came up. Ogden called me a coon. I didn't say anything. I simply looked Van Wert in the eye, and he resented it, and then I called him a cheap bully and he struck me, and the other fellows jumped on me too. Of course I defended myself the best I could, and I can't say but what I was enjoying the situation, when President Norton arrived.

PROF. N. (*laughs*).—Just about what I thought. Van Wert's father is very rich and Van Wert tries to take advantage of this fact to do as he likes. A set of cheap bullies is a fit term for him and his associates, for money doesn't make men. Ben, it's character. Don't you worry, Ben; you've done good work since you've been here, and father and I are going to see you through. Who else saw the affair?

BEN.—Powell and Hart were there

PROF. N.—I'll see them. I think I can depend on them to tell the truth. (*Exit Professor Norton.*)

(*Ben walks slowly and seems depressed. Enters Lawyer Neil; slaps Ben on the back.*)

BEN.—Why, Mr. Neil, how did you happen over to-day?

NEIL.—Oh, I must get over once in a while and see how my Kentucky lad is making out. The fact of the matter is Ben, that all of us here at Bayview are proud of the record you have made, and we wish to do something to show our appreciation, and I thought I'd start the ball a-rolling by extending a reception to you at our home Thursday evening; and, oh, yes, Mrs. Neil and Edith will expect you to dinner at six on the same evening. If Edith were older, and you hadn't talked so much of that little Lindy you left down in old Kentucky, I might be afraid to have you over so much. By the way, have you heard from home lately? I've been so busy I've neglected you like everything this year.

BEN.—Yes I hear from Aunt Rhoda and Miss Lou and them regularly. Colonel White, where Aunt Rhoda lived, is dead, my Uncle Jake is dead, my Cousin Sue's married, Miss Lou's beau, Mr. Robert White, is married, and Miss Lou and my little Cousin Lindy are in England visiting "Lady Mary" as Aunt Rhoda calls her.

NEIL (*whistles*).—Whew! Why, Ben, you're indirectly connected with the English nobility, aren't you? You spoke of the colored people building a college there at your home. Is it completed?

BEN.—Yes, sir. They've put up a fine brick building with stone foundations on the very spot where the Ku-klux burnt down the old Cross Roads Church where the Quaker teacher taught, and, strange to say, she is back teaching colored children on the very spot where she suffered persecution

NEIL.—Don't call it strange, Ben. When "truth gets a hearing" mighty changes take place; and when any people have it in their hearts to rise as strongly as the Negro race, God will raise up friends for them on every hand, and victory will be theirs. But I must be going.

BEN.—I wanted to speak to you about a little trouble I am in.

NEIL.—Trouble? Come up to your room and tell me all about it. That's the way we lawyers make our living, you know—off of other people's troubles.

Curtain.



ACT IV.

SCENE V. (*Parlors of Lawyer Neil's beautiful home arranged for a reception. Palms conceal an orchestra. Piano and other appropriate furnishings. Ben discovered alone. He is in a well-fitting suit. Looks well. Enters Edith Neil in a reception gown. She is barely sixteen.*)

BEN (*rising*).—Well, Miss Edith, have you come at last?

EDITH.—Alone, Mr. Houston? Hasn't papa come yet? Too bad he had to miss dinner, when he had planned to have such a nice hour with you. Oh, the life of a professional man! I wouldn't marry one for anything. You can never depend on having them when you want them.

BEN.—I don't think I'd be hard to find. It's been so long since I've had a home, I think I'd wish to stay all the time.

EDITH.—That's what you say now, but men change after they are married.

BEN.—Do they, little Miss Worldly-Wise? I can't imagine any one changing toward you.

EDITH.—Can't you? Don't try to flirt with me, sir. You college boys are dreadful. Papa told me he believed you were engaged to a girl in Kentucky.

BEN.—Did you believe it? (*Enters Neil.*)

NEIL (*shakes hands heartily with Ben; kisses Edith*).—Run away, little girl. I wish to see Houston privately. (*Exit Edith fouting.*)

NEIL.—Well, Ben, my boy, you came out all right. I told you you would, didn't I? Those fellows have had a bad record ever

since they landed here. Professor Norton 'phoned me about it this morning. He was very anxious about the outcome.

BEN.—I know he was, but not half so much as I, right here on the eve of my graduation. Fortunately, Powell and Hart couldn't be bribed by Van Wert's money, and what they said exonerated me from serious fault. I lost my temper, all right, and, as I told Professor Norton, when President Norton came up and I had Van Wert down, I was enjoying the situation.

NEIL.—It was time to lose your temper, I think, when three fellows had you down, pounding the life out of you. I went in for athletics a good deal when I was in college, and I was always in good trim for the boys. (*Laughs.*) Say, Ben, as long as you have selected law as your profession, I may take you in as a partner some day if you decide to settle here.

BEN.—Thank you, Mr. Neil. This is more than I deserve.

(*Bell rings. Enters neat-looking maid.*)

MAID.—A gentleman to see Mr. Houston.

NEIL.—Tell him to come in. Come up to my den when your caller has gone, Ben, and let's finish building our air castles.

(*Exit Neil. Maid admits Professor Norton.*)

PROF. N. (*looks around*).—First time I was ever in Neil's. Hang it! he's got everything in excellent taste. (*Looks at pictures.*) He's got some good pictures.

BEN (*who has risen*).—Good evening. Nothing wrong with President Norton, is there. He wasn't feeling so well this morning.

PROF. N. (*shaking Ben's hand*).—No, nothing wrong with us, but a telegram came for you, and, knowing how attached you are to that old auntie of yours, as it was on my way, I stopped with it. I hope there's nothing wrong with her, or Mrs. White, or any of them.

BEN.—Thank you, Professor. It was very kind of you. (*Takes telegram and tears it open nervously and reads. Smiles.*) It's the best news I ever got in my life! Miss Lou and Lindy are back in America! They're in New York. Some one of Miss Lou's English relations has left her a fortune, and they're coming to my graduation, and they're going to bring Aunt Rhody too!

PROF. N.—Is Miss Lou's husband with her? I mean Mrs. White, of course.

BEN.—Who said Miss Lou was married? They like to tormented the life out of her to have Mr. Robert White, but she wouldn't do it, and Aunt Rhoda told me he'd married one of the Draine girls, and certainly had his match.

PROF. N.—Miss Lou not married! Then why didn't you say so, you idiot?

BEN (*in surprise*).—Why, Professor Norton, you don't know Miss Lou? (*Aside.*) I wonder if dear old Professor has lost his mind.

PROF. N.—I know her so well that I never would have stayed away from her all of these years had I not thought that she belonged to some one else. Miss Lou, my sweet little Southern rose! I met her in New Orleans, Ben, when she was just out of short dresses, and I loved her from the first time I laid eyes on her. I was only restrained from speaking by a sense of honor. I was told that she loved her Cousin Robert, that they were engaged and would be married when she returned. When you first came and I asked you a few questions concerning her, your answers confirmed my worst fears.

BEN.—Great Caesar! what a plaything fate makes of us. This is certainly a great surprise to me. I hope you'll win her yet. I don't know any other man on earth who's good enough for Miss Lou. She's sent me money several times since I've been in college, and said it was a debt she owed Aunt Rhoda. Aunt Rhoda is her mammy, you know.

PROF. N.—No, I didn't know that. When will they get here?

BEN.—The telegram does not say. It is from Lindy Roberts, my cousin, who went to England with Miss Lou. She says they will let us know when they arrive. Unless they wire me again, I won't know what train to meet.

PROF. N.—Oh, what cruel suspense! If it were not Commencement time I'd leave for New York to-night. Well, I must go.

(Exit Professor Norton.)

BEN.—Oh, yes; I must go up to the den.

(Exit Ben. Enter Edith Neil, Julia Storm, Ida Campbell.)

EDITH.—My first reception! Oh, I know I shall enjoy myself to-night. Say, girls, how sweet you both look! It was nice of you to come early. We've had such a time to-day. I told mamma it was a blessing she had taught me to work. The girl left last night and we had a time finding some one to serve dinner. You know we had Mr. Houston for dinner to-night.

IDA.—Oh, did you? That's why he couldn't come to play tennis.

JULIA.—Edith, you mustn't set your cap for Mr. Houston. You're just coming out. You're too young. You must give Ida and me a chance.

EDITH.—I'd set my cap for him if I thought 'twas any use. Papa's just crazy about him, but I'm afraid a Southern girl has cut us out. He was talking about her at the dinner table. She's in England traveling with a white lady.

IDA.—The idea! Nothing but a servant girl. I should think he'd look higher. *(Bell rings several times. Music strikes up.)*

EDITH.—Oh, our guests are arriving! Come, girls, let's see if everything is ready. *(Exit girls.)*

(Enter Mr. and Mrs. Neil, with Ben. Girls come back and form a receiving line. Enter guests.)

EDITH.—Dr. and Mrs. Lynch, Mr. Houston.

IDA.—Rev. and Mrs. Berry.

JULIA.—Judge and Mrs. Carroll.

EDITH.—Mr. Albert Carroll, our poet.

JULIA.—Madame Delphine Lewis, our vocalist.

EDITH.—And here is Mrs. Craig, whose new book is making her so famous.

JULIA.—Professor Gibbs, the artist.

(Guests come forward as they are introduced, and seat themselves.)

NEIL.—Friends, it affords me much pleasure to-night to have you meet our young guest, Mr. Benjamin Banneker Houston, for whom I predict a seat in Congress if he keeps on as he has begun. *(Subdued applause.)* We who have watched Mr. Houston from the time that he entered the doors of our great university know that he was in every sense of the word at the foot of the ladder. His only assets were honesty, love of learning and a willingness to work hard. Scorned by many of the students, he went quietly on his way doing good work in all of his classes and sustaining throughout his college career an unimpeachable record. Not only has he conquered the prejudice of the faculty and students, but for the most part he has won their respect and admiration as well, and he will represent his university in the coming State oratorical contest this fall. *(Applause.)* This being the eve of Mr. Houston's graduation, I have asked you here to meet him and to rejoice with me that we have a young man of our race so earnest, so persistent, so eloquent. I will now ask Mr. Houston to say a word. *(Applause.)*

BEN.—Honored Host, Ladies and Gentlemen: From Cabin to Congress is a long stretch, but if Mr. Neil's predictions are ever verified, that is the distance it will mean for me. I confess that

my aspirations have not soared so high as that. When I entered the doors of your great university, I had no well-defined thought of a great career, political or otherwise; I simply obeyed the intolerable longing for knowledge that had arisen in my soul, and sought to assuage it. It seems strange, but it is true, that it was the account of Lawyer Neil's own graduation, that I read in an old newspaper in Kentucky, that gave me the determination to get a college education. (*Applause.*) The measure of success that has so far attended my humble endeavors I owe to the teachings of my mother in our little Kentucky cabin. I wish no higher life than the opportunity to serve my fellows. I thank Lawyer Neil for this opportunity to meet some of the most cultured and gifted of my own people, and I pledge myself to-night to press forward toward the highest achievements within my reach. (*Applause.*)

NEIL.—How do you like the ring of my Congressional timber? We will now be favored with a song by Madame Delphine Lewis. (*Madame Lewis sings. Applause.*)

NEIL.—Miss Storm and Miss Campbell will favor us with a duet, I am sure. (*Julia and Ida play.*)

NEIL.—Will Professor Harris give us a song? (*Professor Harris sings.*)

BEN.—I am not taking the place of the master of ceremonies, but if Miss Edith would sing—

MRS. NEIL.—Sing my favorite, Edith.

NEIL.—Certainly she will sing. (*Edith plays and sings.*) And now if the orchestra will favor us with a march, we will go to the dining room. Mr. Houston, will you take Miss Neil?

(*Guests fall in line while march is being played, and follow Neil, Mrs. Neil, Ben and Edith off stage.*)

Curtain.

ACT V.

SCENE III. (*A private sitting room in a hotel. Miss Lou in a black tailor-made gown, hat and black mourning veil is standing at the window. She is prettier than ever. Lindy, grown very pretty, is stylishly gowned. She walks nervously around the room and occasionally looks in the glass.*)

LINDY.—Oh, Miss Lou, I'm so nervous! Just think, it's been almost seven years since I saw Ben. Suppose he don't like me when he sees me, after being with all these pretty girls here in the North. Do you think I look as well as I did when he left home? He called me his little sweetheart Lindy the day he left.

MISS LOU.—Is it possible that you don't realize that time and training have made you a very handsome girl? You foolish Lindy! And then, if you were homely, your disposition would make you loved anyway. If Ben doesn't appreciate you after the way you've worked and studied to educate yourself and be a fit companion for him, I shall be disappointed in him, that's all.

(*Enters Aunt Rhody with various articles of clothing in her hand.*)

AUNT R.—Miss Lou, I jus' wish you'd come up to my room and see how them ornery uniform men done tu'n my bran new trunk upside down and got my bes' black dress and everything else all mussed up. They ought to be arrested for such doings.

MISS LOU.—I'll be there in a minute, mammy. Don't worry. The porters didn't mean to be so rough, I'm sure.

AUNT R.—'Course they meant it. They jus' natchnally hate to see a colored person have a trunk like that. (*Marches out angrily.*)

LINDY.—Oh, my heart beats!

MISS LOU.—That's love, Lindy. That was the way my heart did when Mr. Norton used to come to the school to see his cousins.

LINDY.—Mr. Norton! What Mr. Norton?

MISS LOU.—Oh, a handsome young professor from the North that I met at the school in New Orleans.

LINDY.—Norton! Where have I heard that name? Oh, President Norton and Professor Norton, Ben's friends.

MISS LOU.—This was Professor Norton too, but it isn't likely that he is related in any way with Ben's friends. I see Ben didn't lose any time. Here he comes now.

LINDY.—Oh, Miss Lou!

(Exit Miss Lou. Enter Ben. He gives one look at Lindy.)

BEN.—Whew! but you're a stunner! *(Kisses her repeatedly.)* My cabin princess, why didn't you tell me how handsome you had grown, so I would have known what to expect? Always writing that I would be disappointed when I saw you! You little hypocrite!

LINDY *(looking up into his face)*.—And you are really not disappointed in me?

BEN.—Yes, I am disappointed. I didn't expect you to be half so pretty and so well dressed. *(Kisses her again.)*

LINDY.—I'm so happy, Ben. I have thought of you night and day, and the years seemed so long.

(Enters Aunt Rhoda.)

AUNT R.—I know you two ain't half through kissing, but maybe you'll get another chance. Howdy, Ben, Howdy! *(Hugs him.)* Oh, if Lucy Ann could see you now! *(Cries for joy.)*

(Messenger boy raps. Hands Ben message. He reads it.)

BEN *(to boy)*.—All right. There's no answer. Aunt Rhoda,

you don't know how happy it makes me to see you. You're all the mother I've got, you know.

AUNT R.—You've been more like a son to me than anything else. When you would send me money I always told Miss Lou that I knew you were robbing yourself.

(Enter Miss Lou. She goes up and takes both of Ben's hands.)

MISS LOU.—Ben Houston, what a splendid specimen of manhood you are! I am proud of you!

BEN.—Ah, Miss Lou, I owe so much to you!

MISS LOU.—Nonsense! Be good to this foolish Lindy, who has tormented herself all the way from England with the thought that she would not meet your expectations.

BEN *(Looks at watch and then at window)*.—I think she's in a better frame of mind already, Miss Lou. Miss Lou, excuse us a few minutes. I want to take Aunt Rhoda and Lindy around the block.

MISS LOU.—Certainly. Make it as pleasant for them as you can. Don't get the engagement ring yet. I bought one in London that I think you will like.

BEN.—All right, Miss Lou. I forgot to tell you that you're looking fine. You're as rosy as a Kentucky peach. The sea voyage did you good.

MISS LOU.—It did us both good, and in more ways than one. My mother's brother took such a liking to me that he made me his heiress, and when my Lindy marries I shall give her a nice little sum for herself. Run on now. No time for pretty speeches.

BEN *(Looks out window)*.—No, we must go at once!

(Miss Lou seats herself at piano and removes hat and veil and begins to play. Maid enters with card. Miss Lou takes card.)

MISS LOU.—Arthur Norton! Can it be—— I will see the gentleman here. *(Exit maid, enter Professor Norton.)*

PROF. N. (*extending hand*).—Miss Lou, have you forgotten me?

MISS LOU.—No, but you have changed. Your eyes are sad and you have a moustache.

PROF. N.—And you wore your hair down and not up. Oh, dearest, to think I have known Ben since the day he first came and never knew until he received your telegram that you did not marry your cousin Robert.

MISS LOU.—Did you care?

PROF. N.—Did I care? Oh, my sweet shy southern rose, yes; because I love you, and have since I first saw you and I want you for my own. Now that I have you on my own territory you shall not escape me again. You don't love anyone else, do you dear?

MISS LOU. (*throws arms about his neck*).—I loved you too since that happy day in New Orleans, that is why I could not please my father and wed my Cousin Robert.

PROF. N. (*kisses her hands*).—I can hardly believe my ears. I have been hopeless so long. Listen. If you will consent we will be married at once. My parents will call and take you to their home this evening.

MISS LOU.—Married right away? What will I do with Lindy and Aunt Rhoda?

PROF. N.—Ben graduates to-morrow night. Fine fellow Ben. He has crowded eight years' work into his six years' chance. He'll be wanting to marry pretty soon himself, and in the meantime your humble friends can make their home with us.

MISS LOU.—Oh, how nice you are. That is just what I would like. Out of the fortune left me I had resolved to give each of these three loyal friends sufficient to give them a start. Mammy I shall want near me as long as she lives. Her children would have to come here or she'd never stay.

PROF. N.—I will buy her a little place to-morrow, and I'll send Ben after the children. He needs a vacation. How will that **do**? Now will you name the day?

MISS LOU.—I am at your mercy, sir, any time you please.

Curtain.



ACT V.

SCENE 7.—(*Ben's living room. He is at his desk. Lindy is reading. Aunt Rhoda is piecing a quilt with blocks on the floor.*)

LINDY.—How's your rheumatism to-night Aunt Rhoda?

AUNT R.—It don't bother me a bit, that medicine Lige give me helps me more'n anything I ever tried.

LINDY.—Lige is doing so well in his practice you should be proud of him. It's nire to have a Dr. White in the family.

AUNT R.—Yes, yes that part's alright, but it's the first time I ever took any of his medicine in my insides. Being proud of a doctor in the family and letting him experiment on you like these young doctors do is two different things. But I sure have got lots to be thankful for anyhow. Sue's married to the minister and in her own home, Pansy and Louphenia's is teaching and Lige is doctoring. Gladstone says that he's going to graduate from his Cousin Ben's college and he's going to stay with Miss Lou 'til he graduate.

BEN.—Wise Gladstone, Prof. Norton will certainly see him through.

LINDY.—The way Lige and Edith act I think there'll be a wedding before long.

AUNT R.—Can she cook? Lige is just as greedy 'bout eating as ever.

LINDY. (*mischievously*).—I don't know, ask Ben; she was his girl before I came.

BEN.—Don't you believe her Aunt Rhoda, Lindy was the only girl I ever had. Yes, she can cook of course not like you and Lindy.

AUNT R.—Well, I can stand it if Lige can.

LINDY.—Hasn't Miss Lou got three beautiful children?

AUNT R.—What's the matter with yours?

LINDY.—Benjamin Jr. and Lucy! Nothing, they are as sweet as they can be. I just put them to bed, precious darlings. Ben, do you know what day this is? It's our tenth marriage anniversary!

AUNT R.—Great head of the church, why didn't you say something about it, so you could have had a brass wedding?

LINDY.—Tin wedding, Aunt Rhoda. *(Ben laughs.)*

AUNT R. *(stiffly)*.—Well, what's the difference? I'm sure brass is worth more than tin.

BEN.—Lindy, I confess I have been so busy during the last presidential campaign that I might have forgotten that I was married at all if you had neglected any of your wifely lectures.

LINDY.—Almost forgot you were married did you? *(pulls his ears.)* Shame on you.

(Bell rings. Maid goes to door.)

LINDY.—I wonder who's coming. Turn on the lights, Mary. *(Enters Prof. Norton, Miss Lou, Lawyer Neil and those who were at the reception at Neils'.)*

BEN.—Why come in friends this is an unexpected pleasure, I am sure. Have seats. *(Shakes hands with all.)*

PROF. N.—Yes, be seated, I have a word to say:

Friends, some seventeen years ago, when our distinguished orator and fellow townsmen arrived at Bayview, fresh from a Kentucky cabin I had to plead to get him admitted to our University. Step by step he has made his way, until he is acknowledged to be one of the most polished orators of the day. Not only does he excel in oratory, but his services in municipal and

state affairs have proven him to be a man of deeds as well. He has thrown himself into every work of reform and shown himself a leader of men, it is therefore a very great pleasure to me to say to you that Mr. Benjamin Banneker Houston will represent us in Congress. (*cheers.*)

"Honor and shame from
No condition rise,
But we build the ladder by
Which we rise,
From the lowly earth to the
Vaulted skies, and we climb
The ladder round by round."

(*Cheers.*)

MISS LOU.—Ben, Lindy, I am so glad for you.

GUESTS.—Speech, speech!

BEN.—Friends, fellow citizens, I would not be human if at this hour I did not feel my breast throbbing with patriotic pleasure at being chosen by my fellow-men to represent them in some of the affairs of state. I feel unworthy of the great honor conferred upon me, but since you have bestowed it, I will try to show my gratitude by good hard earnest work. I feel that I have a three-fold part to play, first as a representative of more than ten millions of Negro citizens, struggling for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, next as an American representing the entire boundary of the United States, and then as a part of the law-making bodies of the grandest republic on earth. (*cheers.*)

(*Band plays America.*)

BEN. (*wipes eyes*).—And my fellow-citizens, I thank you for the recognition that you have given me as a black man. We love our country. When she is in danger our men march to the front and bare their bosoms to the enemy's as freely as do the white men, and in times of peace we are equally as law abiding, all we ask is a man's chance and we will prove to you that we have within us all of the elements that go to make up the highest type of

American citizenship. As I look around me to-night, I look into the faces of several who have helped to shape the current of my life. Aunt Rhoda who took me in, and shared her cabin fare of bacon and hoe-cakes with a motherless lad, Miss Lou, who was my Sunday school teacher and friend, my wife who has inspired within me the deepest reverence for the women of my race, and Prof. Norton and his father and Lawyer Neil, who made it possible for me to go through college.

I would say to the young men of my race that there is hope for them. No matter how discouraging things may look at times, honesty of purpose and hard work will win out. The Providence which takes me from the cabin to Congress, will smile on all who put their trust in God and do the Right.

Curtain



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